LITERAL KITCHEN NIGHTMARES

a Mothgrinder fan fiction by Ryan Salazar
illustrated by Marie Songer

Gordon Ramsay stood in front of the walk-in refrigerator, readying himself to open it. He was contractually obligated to search the contents of the fridge, in the hopes of finding any impurities he could chew out the pizzeria staff for. This fridge felt different however, like the chill in the air extended past the sealed door, cutting through the core of Gordon's very being.

Gordon took a deep breath and pulled the fridge open. He expected the warm glow of a lightbulb to illuminate the interior, but instead found a ceaseless abyss of existential dread, extending so far into the distance the light of the kitchen around him couldn't reach any discernible end.

"What the fuck?" asked Gordon, poking his head into the opening. The neverending darkness of the fridge felt ice cold. Gordon quickly realized he couldn't hear the comforting hum of a refrigeration unit creating the chill around him. The darkness and the cold were one in the same. Gordon pulled himself back from the fridge, feeling a slight resistance in the process, as if the darkness beyond didn't want him to leave. He turned his head toward the kitchen staff.

"Mario, two seconds," he said, motioning to the head chef.

Mario walked over, his face already filled with shame.

"Mario, what the fuck is this?" asked Gordon, motioning toward the nightmarish cavern hidden inside the kitchen appliance.

"That's our refrigerator, chef," replied Mario, sheepishly.

"Are you joking me?" Gordon asked, his brow furrowed. "This isn't a fridge, this is a gateway to eldritch horror!" Gordon reached into his pocket, and pulled out a tiny flashlight, clicking it on. The extra light from the flashlight only served to illustrate how much further the chasm of darkness extended beyond human comprehension. "Come with me.".

Gordon and Mario entered the refrigeration unit, two explorers entering the infinite unknown. The kitchen behind them seemingly ceased to exist, and the walk-in refrigerator around them became a liminal space, existing beyond time itself. Gordon and Mario had become one with the emptiness.

Gordon turned his head, to see a metal shelf holding a few plastic buckets. He quickly moved towards them, picking one at random to inspect.

“Look at this!” said Gordon, pulling the plastic wrap off the top of the bucket. Inside was a pile of slimy chicken cutlets, long past their expiration date. Gordon reached his fingers into the pot, pulling out one cutlet. He gave it a quick sniff, recoiling in disgust.

“Smell this!” said Gordon, holding the cutlet to Mario’s face. Mario, eyes wide with terror, brought his nose to the decaying bird flesh, and breathed in deep.

“It smells sour,” said Mario, embarrassed.

“It’s rotten!” shouted Gordon, dropping the cutlet into the bucket.

“Maybe we can add sugar and call it sweet and sour chicken?” Mario asked, with a nervous laugh. It was clear he was already cracking under the pressure of Gordon’s inspection.

“Is this a fucking joke to you?” asked Gordon. He reached in and grabbed a handful of the decaying meat, to show Mario.

“No, chef!” said Mario, immediately recognizing that Gordon wasn’t in a joking mood.

“Then stop fucking around!” said Gordon, spiking the bucket of meat into the ground.

Gordon turned his attention to the wall behind the shelf, pitch black, with a rough texture to it. He placed a bare fingertip against the surface, scraping off a thick glob of dust from it, before rolling it between his forefinger and thumb.

“Fuck! When’s the last time this was cleaned?” asked Gordon, showing his dirty digits to Mario.

“Last week,” said Mario, unable to break his gaze with the dust on Gordon’s fingers. He felt as if the dust was beckoning him to venture further into the darkness.

“Last week!?” shouted Gordon. “This dust has been here since before the birth of the universe, you fucking donkey!”

As he finished his insult, Gordon sensed something in the abyss beyond. “What’s this over here?” he asked, pointing into the nothingness. He and Mario ventured further into the void, and after what felt like several eternities, they came across a body, face down on the ground.

“Fuck!” said Gordon, moving toward the corpse.

“Mario, look at this!” Gordon flipped over the corpse, revealing a decayed human body, with a nametag reading ‘Chef Gordon Ramsay’.

“What the fuck!?” Gordon said, holding up the corpse for Mario to see. “Look at this! Look at the body!” Mario was visibly panicked, unable to form words.

“Talk to me, Mario!” shouted Gordon, holding up the corpse even higher.

“I-I-I,” stuttered Mario, his brain fully in panic mode.

“Mario, eyes on me,” said Gordon, snapping his fingers.

“We cannot have a fridge that reveals to us the death of our own egos! This breaks every food safety code!”

In the distance something scuttled. Gordon dropped the corpse, shining his flashlight toward the noise. As he looked into the abyss, the abyss looked back with two red glowing eyes. Sensing imminent danger, Gordon stood tall. His television host bravado kicked in, and he marched towards the obscured figure, continuing to shine his pocket flashlight. As he moved forward, the figure leapt high into the air, disappearing into the darkness. Gordon frantically shined his light around, searching for those red eyes. As he did so, he heard the sound of large wings flapping closer and closer.

Being a black belt in karate, Gordon knew his sense of sight was only holding him back, so he closed his eyes, and focused his sense of hearing on the oncoming object. With lightning fast reflexes, Gordon reached out into the darkness, catching the figure as it attempted to swoop down on him. He pulled the figure down into the soft glow of his flashlight, revealing a horrifying mix between a moth and a human infant.

“Oh goodness,” says Gordon, firmly holding onto Baby Mothman. "Oh dear. You poor thing. Come here. Papa Ramsay has you.”

Gordon swaddled the baby mothman in his arms, and the creature immediately clung to his chest, gently nibbling on the fabric of Gordon's apron. Gordon's seventeen total Michelin stars materialized around him, combining with the faint light emanating from his pocket flashlight. The light of his torch grew fierce, causing the overwhelming darkness around them to recoil. The unending cold of the space began to dissipate, replaced by the warmth of Gordon's maternal embrace.

“Mario, follow me,” said Gordon. The two lost souls and their baby cryptid trudged through the tunnel of nihilistic terror. With each step, wildflowers bloomed beneath Gordon’s feet. Another eternity passed as they moved through waning darkness, until eventually they found the doorway back into the kitchen. As they emerged from the fridge, the rest of the staff stood in awe, watching the radiant celebrity chef and his crew re-enter their plane of existence.

“I need everyone to stop what they are doing, and gather around,” proclaimed Gordon, with the confidence only a muti-millionaire trained by Marco Pierre White could wield.

The staff of the pizzeria all involuntarily dropped their cooking utensils and shuffled over to the all-powerful Gordon, bending the knee before their new king. Mario sheepishly kneeled behind two of the line chefs, hoping Gordon would spare him further judgement.

“Now that, was a fucking disgrace!” began Gordon, his voice conveying a mixture of transcendental disappointment and a mild tummy ache. “I have never, in all my years of hosting this show, seen such a foul refrigerator! I need everyone to get their cleaning supplies, because we are going to scrub down every inch of that abyss, and throw out all of the rotten food and corpses inside!”

“Yes, chef!” said the entire cooking staff, none brave enough to make eye contact with their televised lord and savior.

“I’m going back to my hotel, but tomorrow, we can have a fresh start, and we’ll turn this pizzeria back around!” Gordon exclaimed.

The staff hopped to their feet and began cheering, rushing off to the supply closet to get their cleaning supplies.

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The next day, Gordon stood before the back entrance of the pizzeria, surrounded by the staff, all bowing before their new celebrity deity. “Yesterday was a disaster,” said Gordon. “But I was delighted to see you all come together to turn this kitchen around.”

The staff looked up at their one true god, eyes filled with tearful joy. “Thank you, papa Ramsay!” they all said in unison.

“Follow me inside, because I have a few surprises for you!” Gordon exclaimed, walking into the kitchen.

The staff all rushed to the back entrance, shoving each other over to be the first to see the bounty brought forth by their heavenly father. One by one, they laid eyes upon the freshly renovated kitchen, unable to speak as the sheer euphoria had overpowered their feeble human minds.

“I’d like to welcome you, to your brand new kitchen,” said Gordon, his arms spread wide as a gesture of eternal love and acceptance. “Over here, you’ll see your new state of the art, stainless steel appliances, hand made by yours truly of course.”

The staff gazed upon the new stovetops and prep counters, delicately glistening under the freshly installed LED lights. Every knife and rolling pin were laid out on the counter, still steaming, as if they had just been brought over from the forge.

“And over here,” continued Gordon, his benevolence knowing no bounds. “We have a beautiful, rustic, brick oven, also hand made by yours truly.”

The staff moved their eyes over to the new pizza oven, their dilated pupils eagerly welcoming in the light reflecting off of the surface.

“Unfortunately,” said Gordon. “We were not able to get rid of the walk-in refrigerator for two reasons. First, because it expands beyond the limits of human perception, making it a nightmare to dispose of. And second, because our dear friend, and head chef, Mario, went missing last night while cleaning it, thereby making it an active crime scene.”

The somber words hit the staff like a bucket of chicken cutlets, driving the air from their torsos. They fell to their knees, crying and wailing at the loss of their comrade.

Gordon watched them mourn for a full minute, his face expressing sadness, before cracking a sly grin. “But I do have another surprise for you,” he said, pointing to the kitchen entrance.

The staff paused their lamentations, looking up to see a figure in the shadows.

“It is my honor and privilege to introduce to you, your new head chef,” Gordon said, with a dramatic pause only acceptable in the world of reality television. “Baby Mothman!”

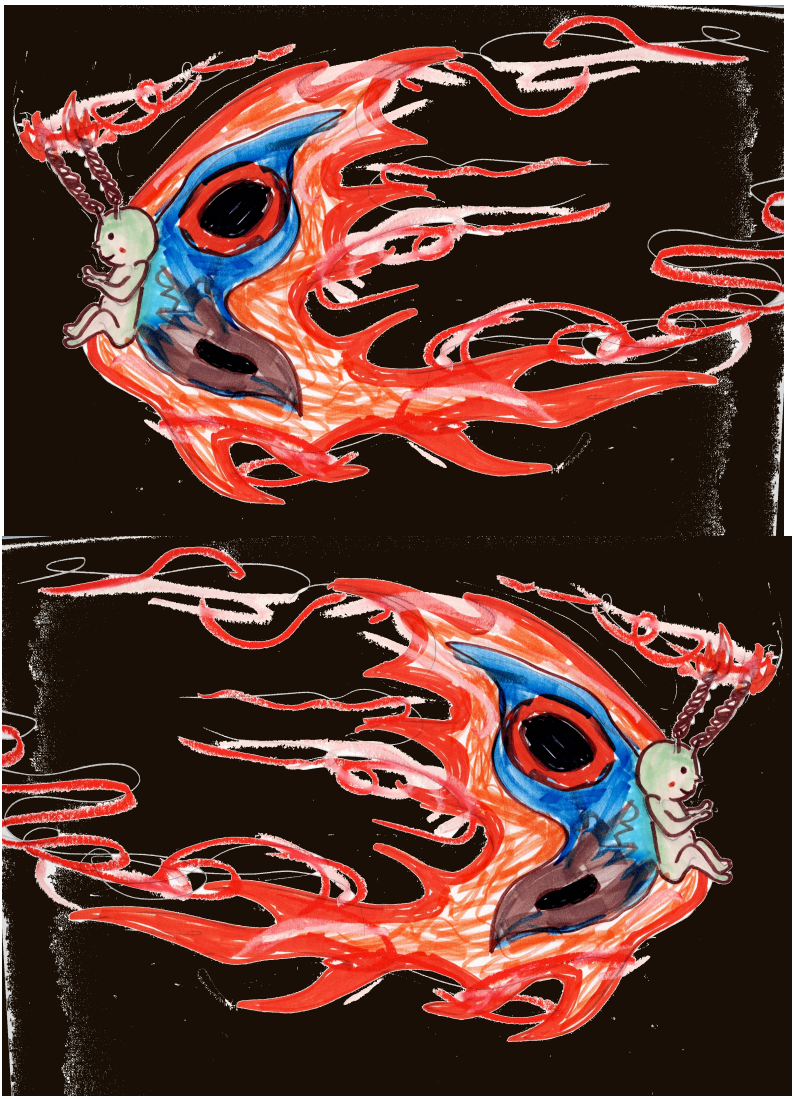
The figure hopped forward, revealing Baby Mothman wearing a tiny apron and chef’s hat, both with several holes chewed into them. The staff began wildly applauding, as their new head chef leapt into the supply closet, so it could chew on the spare aprons.

“Now then,” continued Gordon. “Let’s fire up this pizza oven and start preparing for the lunch rush!”

Gordon reached down, picking up a wooden log resting next to the oven. He took a small knife from his pocket, and with superhuman speed whittled the log into a three-dimensional

topographical map of Italy. As soon as he finished his sculpture, he opened the door to the oven, and tossed it in.

Gordon stepped to the side, allowing the pizzeria staff the chance to bask in the warm glow of the oven, a symbol for their reignited culinary passion. As the staff enjoyed the feeling, they heard large wings flapping in the closet. Before anyone could realize what was happening, Baby Mothman, like a moth to flame, flew directly into the oven, immediately catching fire.



“Jesus Christ!” shouted Gordon, shoving aside members of the staff until he was directly in front of the oven. He reached in, bare handed, to rescue Baby Mothman. But it was too late, as the tiny abomination had already been reduced to smoldering embers. “Oh fuck!” Gordon cried out, scooping up ashes of his immolated child by the handful. The room came to a pause, as Gordon, despite his seemingly limitless power, couldn’t reverse death itself.

Just then, the door of the walk-in refrigerator began to rattle. A loud thud came from the other side, followed by several more, until the door flung open, revealing Mario. The once nervous head chef stood before them, now a grizzled old man, having aged at least ten years overnight. His thick, unkempt beard cut through space and time as he re-entered the universe.

“Looks like today’s special-” Mario said, with a pause so pregnant it was nearly crowning. “Is Mothzerella!”

“Mario,” said Gordon, with a smirk. “You cheeky fucker! Come here!”

Gordon dropped the ashes in his hands, and embraced Mario. The staff all joined in, forming a giant group hug. Truly they had been through an emotional rollercoaster that day, but, in that moment, everyone connected through a shared embrace, they knew that the pizzeria was going to be just fine.

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